

Farm Bill Conservation Programs Benefit Fish and Fishing in Iowa *"Two Success Stories"*

Fishing Better at Iowa's Rathbun Reservoir

Rathbun Reservoir is Iowa's largest lake, located in South Central Iowa. This 11,000 acre reservoir has supported a valuable sport fishery, but influenced by poor water quality. Lake conditions and fishing have improved, however, as the result of efforts of The Rathbun Land and Water Alliance. The goal was to foster a voluntary approach to enhance land, water, and economic resources in the Rathbun region. Among the resources used were Farm Bill Conservation Programs that greatly reduced the annual delivery of phosphorus (511,000 pounds) and sediment (130,000 Tons) to the lake.



Farm Programs benefit land in the Rathbun Lake watershed, lake water quality and fishing:

- CRP – treated 50,129 acres
- Terracing – treated 3,108 acres
- Sediment/nutrient basins - treated 6,358 acres
- Cropland to grassland - treated 687 acres
- Wetland Reserve - treated 31,000 acres



Crappie density increased geometrically as water clarity increased in Rathbun Lake. Today, water clarity is significantly improved and crappie production is 17 times that of past years, years when water transparency was only 10 inches. Lake Rathbun provides excellent fishing and hosts 40 – 80 thousand anglers each year. And over the last 10 years, walleye catch has exceeded the 35-year average nearly 70% of the time and a near record walleye harvest was enjoyed in 2005. These present day catches place Rathbun Lake at the 75th percentile in terms of walleye harvested by anglers.

IOWA TROUT STREAM - MUCH IMPROVED



North Bear Creek
Wild Brown Trout

North Bear Creek, located in Winneshiek County Iowa, historically had trout populations supported solely through the stocking of hatchery fish. A 1994 survey of the stream detected no wild trout present in the stream.

In 2004 another fishery survey documented 1,154 wild brown trout per mile of stream and the size ranged from six to twenty inches.

The North Bear Creek watershed has been the focus of best management practice application for several years, including a watershed project that was initiated by the NRCS in 1999. The following conservation practices were installed:

- five flood control structures
- six sediment or grade control structures
- 5.0 acres of grass waterways
- 45,450 feet of terraces
- 1,550 acres of CRP within the watershed
- 4,700 feet of trout habitat improvement and stream bank stabilization
- 4,635 feet of stream corridor cattle exclusion fencing

Total sediment reduction from these practices, not including the CRP acres, was estimated at 3,650 tons per year.

A survey of Iowa trout anglers estimated 29,000 fishing trips were made to North Bear Creek during the 2001 calendar year. This results in expenditures of \$725,000 per year, a figure that will increase because of angler interest in these fish. It is easy to see why North Bear Creek host more anglers than most Iowa trout streams.



Angler on North Bear Creek